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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: priority theme: women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development

Ministerial round table on strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks for gender equality and women's empowerment

Chair's summary

1. At its 3rd meeting, on 14 March 2016, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks for gender equality and women's empowerment" under the overall theme "Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development". The participants in the round table exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic, emphasizing gender-responsiveness in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. The Secretary of Policies for Women's Work and Economic Autonomy of Brazil, Tatau Godinho, chaired the round table, and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Climate Change, David Nabarro, served as moderator. Ministers and high-level officials from 25 Member States and a representative of the European Commission participated in the round table. The Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for the Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships Bureau of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Lakshmi Puri, made closing remarks.

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Legal reforms and policy measures to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women

3. Many participants stressed the importance of ratifying and implementing the international legal framework for the protection of women's human rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and regional instruments such as the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. There was consensus that strong national legal and policy frameworks were critical to ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment, and progress was reported on efforts to align national frameworks with international human rights instruments.

4. Participants highlighted the adoption of constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex and the adoption of legislation on equal opportunities and gender equality. Progress was reported on legal and policy reforms aimed at the prevention and elimination of violence against women, including female genital mutilation, sexual harassment and domestic violence. Provisions to ensure better work/life balance through measures such as parental leave and affordable and accessible childcare were mentioned as crucial enablers of women's access to the labour market. Other areas of legal and policy reform included changes to penal codes, labour and employment, land and productive resources, health and nationality.

5. Many participants referred to the introduction of temporary special measures in national legal and policy frameworks to accelerate the achievement of equality between women and men. Increases in the numbers of women in political institutions and decision-making bodies, including parliaments, were attributed to strengthened laws on women's participation in political life. Similarly, laws and policies on quotas and targets with regard to women's participation on corporate boards and in private sector management were also highlighted.

Institutional mechanisms and other implementation measures

6. There was broad agreement that it was not sufficient to adopt laws and policies; they needed to be given full effect. Many participants referred to policies, mechanisms and other measures taken to support the implementation of laws aimed at realizing gender equality and women's human rights. National gender equality action plans and strategies were highlighted by a number of participants as important tools, together with integrating gender perspectives into sectoral policies and strategies, such as on poverty reduction. Participants also referred to the adoption of national action plans in specific areas, such as women's health and eliminating violence against women.

7. Participants underscored the role of institutions and mechanisms to promote gender equality and to monitor the implementation of legislation and policies, including through key ministries and gender equality mechanisms. Multisectoral coordination, including with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was considered to be crucial for a more coherent and collaborative approach to promoting gender equality at all levels of government.

8. A number of participants identified collaboration between government and other actors, including civil society, in particular women's and feminist organizations, the private sector and the media, as crucial for effective implementation and monitoring of laws and policies on gender equality. Efforts to enhance the capacity-building of public officials, including law enforcement officials, were highlighted as necessary for a gender-sensitive application of all legal and policy frameworks. Investing in education for women and girls, including education on their human rights, was discussed as being important for their empowerment and for enabling them to claim those rights.

Gaps in progress and key issues for moving forward

9. Despite progress in the promotion and protection of the human rights of women and girls gaps and challenges remain. Many participants stressed the need for further action to remove discriminatory laws and provisions against women, including as a prerequisite for the achievement of all the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Specific measures were needed for women and girls who experience multiple forms of discrimination. Discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes were recognized as major impediments to the achievement of gender equality and required further attention, including in the education system. Participants raised the importance of increasing the engagement of men and boys in challenging discrimination and in nurturing social norms that promoted gender equality.

10. Many participants stressed the lack of comparable high-quality data collected over time. They highlighted the importance of improving the collection and use of data disaggregated by sex to monitor progress and gaps and to inform gender-responsive policymaking, including with respect to the realization of the commitments set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Participants stressed the need for effective and better-resourced national accountability mechanisms and institutions and the critical role of women's organizations in the implementation and monitoring of national and international gender equality commitments. Participants reaffirmed their political commitment to making gender equality a priority for the national implementation of the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and called for increased investment in achieving equality between women and men.